

Student's First Name: Shawn

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Journalism Contest

“Inclusion: Expanding Opportunities”

“Don’t judge a book by its cover” (thinkexist.com). Have you ever heard this famous American Proverb? My parents always told me this simple, yet honest saying when I was little. As I grew older, I soon came to find truth in this statement, realizing that there is much more to a person than what meets the eye. Many times, people in our society are judged by the color of their skin, the size and shape of their body, gender, ethnicity, age, or the physical or mental disabilities they might have. We need to realize as a culture that though we all may look different on the outside, we are all people who just want to be loved, accepted, and included. Inclusion is so vital in this world, where so many people are shunned and rejected for their differences, specifically people with a physical or mental disability. I truly believe that inclusion is the first step in creating a more loving and caring society that will better not ourselves, but the entire world.

In order to have inclusion be a part of our lives, we must first understand what the word inclusion actually means. Webster’s Dictionary states that inclusion is, “the act of including : the state of being included.” Though this concept may look simple on paper, it is much more difficult to apply in life. The main reason that we ever exclude people comes down to the simple fact that we put our own interests before others’. Many times, this includes putting down others for their differences, hoping to raise our own self-image or ego. We are often afraid to look outside of ourselves and see what others have to offer because they have differences we may not

understand. This beautiful quote from Helen Keller, a young woman who became blind and deaf short after her birth, once said, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision” (thinkexist.com). She realized that even though she could not see with her eyes, she could see with her heart.

Helen Keller’s life was flipped upside down when she became ill at the age of 19 months old. When she recovered, after almost losing her life, her parents soon discovered that the illness had left Helen blind and deaf. As Helen grew older, she became more and more difficult to handle. She threw temper tantrums, screaming and breaking many things in the house. You can imagine the difficulty in raising a child that could not communicate. Many of her family members gave up with helping Helen, calling her a “monster,” and wanted to send her to an institution, yet her parents did not. They decided to seek out professional help. They found a woman named Anne Sullivan, who had lost her sight at age five. Ms. Sullivan worked diligently with Helen, trying to teach her manners and show her how words worked. Though it was extremely difficult at times, Ms. Sullivan persisted. After a few months, Helen began to understand the meaning of words. This was nothing short of a miracle. Helen Keller went on to graduate from college, traveled around the country to speak about her experiences with Anne Sullivan, and most importantly, left a legacy as to how each of us should live out our lives. Helen once said, “The public must learn that the blind man is neither genius nor a freak nor an idiot. He has a mind that can be educated, a hand which can be trained, ambitions which it is right for him to strive to realize, and it is the duty of the public to help him make the best of himself so that he can win light through work” (rnib.org).

I believe that the life of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan are ideal examples how we should all live our lives. Anne Sullivan saw past the disabilities of Helen Keller, and decided to

include her in her life. Ms. Sullivan shared her gift of communication with Helen, thus giving her an opportunity to live and grow. By working with her, she not only helped Helen, but also helped the world see past disabilities. If you really think about it, we all have “disabilities.” I have trouble with reading. It normally takes me longer to read a piece of work than my classmates because I have to read at a slower speed to fully understand the meaning of the text. Everyone has obstacles in life, for no one in this world is perfect. Though it may be difficult at times, we must put down our walls of pride and self-centeredness and be open to others’ ideas and methods, no matter what disability one might have.

Each of us is like a piece to the puzzle; we each have our own unique size, shape, color, and purpose. When we are alone, we are nothing. But when we come together, we then have the opportunity to create something... something beautiful and remarkable. We must not let our disabilities define who we are. By focusing on what we can do, we can sooner use the gifts we have been given to make a positive and lasting impact in this world, such as Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. As a community, we should support each other, whether it is at school, at work, at home, or just out in public. By working together, we expand the opportunity to combine our gifts and talents and we can use them to shape this world into a more loving and caring place.